

Wanamaker Hall  
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail  
East End and Van Sant avenues  
Island Heights  
Ocean County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1144

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NJ  
15-15LAH,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20016-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WANAMAKER HALL

HABS No. NJ-1144

Location: East End and Van Sant avenues, Island Heights, Ocean County, New Jersey

Present Owner: Borough of Island Heights, P.O. Box AH, Island Heights, 08732

Present Use: Vacant since 1984

Significance: John Wanamaker built this recreation hall as the central structure of a summer camp serving young employees from his Philadelphia and New York Stores. This military-style camp was an innovation in employer paternalism.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The building's first section--the two-story, square structure at the north end--was constructed in 1904. Called the "Headquarters House" or "the barracks," this section originally housed a reception room, offices, kitchen and an officers' dormitory. In 1908 Wanamaker added a one-story assembly hall, 41' x 81', to the southern end--adding five bays including a central pavilion. Later extensions, probably 1909 and 1913, added two more bays to the south. The first is another pavilion entrance similar in design to the earlier one. The last bay holds a stage, and was originally intended to accommodate a player piano, phonograph, and a branch of the Wanamaker store library. Except for the higher sill height of the windows, the southern most bay matches the original design.<sup>1</sup>
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: John Wanamaker bought the land in 1899, and Rodman Wanamaker assembled additional properties from 1905-1907. In 1925 Rodman Wanamaker transferred ownership to John Wanamakers of Philadelphia for one dollar. Wanamaker's used the site for an employee summer camp which was opened 1900-1941, and during World War II was used by the U.S. Army as a base. In January 1945 John Wanamaker of Philadelphia sold the properties to the Cooperative Social Settlement Society of the City of New York (for one dollar), which in 1947 sold to Camp Wanamaker, Inc. The trustees of the Synod of New Jersey Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. bought the property in 1949, and operated it as a summer camp. The Municipality of Island Heights purchased the camp in

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Kralik, unpublished, undated manuscript, p. 13; and Short and Ford Architects, "Analysis of the Municipal Facilities, " (April 1987), p. 6.

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1972 for \$225,000.<sup>2</sup>

4. Builders, suppliers: George McKraig of Island Heights.
5. Alterations and additions: Besides the major structural additions mentioned above as the building grew lengthwise, several important external elements have disappeared. The corner oriels and the belvedere were removed, as were the external stairs. Asbestos shingling now covers the shakes. The windows are intact, though boarded up. Inside, the hall has been divided into two rooms (from the days it served as borough hall), with a dropped ceiling in the northern section--though most of the dropped ceiling has in turn dropped onto the floor. Wheelchair ramps have been added on the east and west sides. A shed enclosure now abuts the western elevation between the original building and the first entrance pavilion.

B. Historical Context:

John Wanamaker, an innovator in the development of the American department store and mass retail sales, founded the John Wanamaker Commercial Institute (JWCI) in 1896 as a vocational and non-vocational training program for his young employees.<sup>3</sup> The 1915 JWCI yearbook states the organization's goals: "The purpose of the institute is to enable its students, while earning a livelihood, to obtain, by textbooks, lectures, drills and schools of daily opportunity, such personal development and practical and technical education in the arts and sciences of commerce and trade as will equip them to fill honorable positions in life and increase personal earning power." Each young person had approximately 5-7 hours per week of classroom instruction (taken from the work day)--supposedly compensating for the education these employees missed in the years before child labor laws. Instructors divided the Institute into three units: the junior boys (14-16 years old), the senior boys (16-18 years old), and the girls. In the 1915 commencement exercises for the seniors, one speaker pointed out that "In all the work the teachers aim to correlate the material so as to make it serve purposes in the stores." This practical slant would in theory better hold the students' attention, and would better support the store's interests.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Deeds 1320:448, 1246:278, 1171:83, 652:178, Ocean County Clerks office, Tom's River, New Jersey. Additional material from unpublished, undated manuscript by Marilyn Kralik.

<sup>3</sup> The store ran educational activities for employees since 1891. Meadowbrook Club Yearbook 1920, (The Wanamaker Store, Philadelphia, 1920), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> The John Wanamaker Commercial Institute 1915, (The Wanamaker Store, Philadelphia, 1915), no pages.

Two years after the founding the JWCI, John Wanamaker purchased bayfront land in Island Heights which would be suitable for a summer camp. Island Heights offered convenient rail transportation to both Philadelphia and New York, sites of Wanamaker's major stores; and with its Methodist origins the town was a wholesome resort location compared to the decadence of the emerging secular resorts on the Jersey Shore. For the first four years of the camp, 1900-1904, the employees lived in canvas tents, and in 1904 the original barracks was constructed to provide protection during the occasionally wet summers.<sup>5</sup> The camp had two-week sessions for boys, and in 1907 girl employees spent their first two-week vacation at Island Heights. Junior cadets (boys) were required to attend camp (free of cost) if they were employed prior to May 1st of the same year; those employed prior to January 1st received one week's pay; those who had attended two consecutive camps received two week's pay; and four consecutive years earned three week's pay.<sup>6</sup> The cadets, as the JWCI employees were known, continued to live in army tents after the barracks' construction--although in 1914 wooden platforms were added to increase their comfort. The boys selected their tentmates.<sup>7</sup>

From its beginnings the camp followed an essentially military organization--with an emphasis on daily dress parades, military bands, and formation marches. From 1910 to 1920 an officers' training camp was held at the barracks, and it appears that the World War certainly reinforced this military inclination. Early newspaper articles emphasize how much the town enjoyed the drills and dress parades; on one unusual Sunday in August 1910, the newspaper claimed that 2,000 attended the cadet's dress parade.<sup>8</sup> The JWCI bands regularly performed at the Island Heights Yacht Club, the public pavilion, and at other clubs and local events.<sup>9</sup> Many of the early photos have captured the cadets in formation, with flags, wooden guns, marching and performing. Nevertheless, despite its regimented schedule, battalions and companies, officers and cadets, the camp also

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<sup>5</sup> Unidentified 7/21/1904 article, clipping files, collection of Marilyn Kralik.

<sup>6</sup> Meadowbrook Club Yearbook 1920, p.35.

<sup>7</sup> The John Wanamaker Commercial Institute 1915, no page.

<sup>8</sup> Unidentified August 11, 1910 article, clipping file, collection of Marilyn Kralik.

<sup>9</sup> See for example August 26, 1909; July 28, 1904 The New Jersey Courier; and The John Wanamaker Commercial Institute 1915, "Record of Daily Happenings."

provided regular waterfront activities in swimming and boating. One photograph of the swimming hour best illustrates the relaxed and informal side of the Island Heights camp.

In 1909 Wanamaker founded the Meadowbrook Club, an athletically-oriented club which would complement the more academic orientation of the JWCI. Meadowbrook's 1920 yearbook stated that "Here is just the problem of to-day as it exists in the Wanamaker Store; the problem of how to keep the intellectual boy and girl from becoming physically flabby and of how to keep the athletic employee from becoming intellectually flabby."<sup>10</sup> This emphasis on physical development also drew impetus from World War I; the nation's draft revealed that many young men were "deficient physically."<sup>11</sup> Wanamaker's constructed a complete athletic facility on the Philadelphia store's rooftop, and used an athletic field at the corner of 23rd and Market. The Club competed regularly against high schools, colleges and other athletic clubs.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps because of the Meadowbrook Club, by 1914 a major element of the Island Heights camp activities were athletic competitions between the Philadelphia and New York stores. This aura of rivalry permeated most aspects of the camp's organization, including tent inspections, rifle practice, drill ratings, track and field, and baseball. Cadets competed by company, individual, age group, and Meadowbrook vs. Millrose (the New York store's equivalent club)--but the basic competition was New York vs Philadelphia.<sup>13</sup>

Several records allow for a brief overview of life at the camp, and some speculation as to how the girls' experience differed from the boys'. The "Inspector-instructor" of the 1914 encampment submitted a "Report of J.W.C.I. Annual Encampment, 1914" to the J.W.C.I. Regiment's "Commanding Officer." The following describes the launching of the 1914 season.

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<sup>10</sup> "Mind and Body: How They are Developed at the Wanamaker Store," 1920, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Meadowbrook Club Yearbook, p. 21 and p. 113.

<sup>12</sup> On the roof--"There is a fine circular track (ten laps to the mile), a straightaway running track of sixty yards, tennis courts, basketball courts, a recreation room, showers and various other attractions..." Meadowbrook Club Yearbook 1920, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> The John Wanamaker Commercial Institute 1915, no page.

Before the departure of the First Camp period, the Honorable John Wanamaker addressed the boys in the armory and presented the camp flag. The departure for camp was prompt and without confusion; the baggage had been loaded the day before departure, which made quick entraining possible. After leaving the armory, each detachment going to camp marched through the Store and down Market Street to the Pennsylvania Railroad ferry, to Camden, where they entrained in a "special" with vestibule cars. On arrival at Island Heights, the regiment detrained quickly. The baggage was unloaded from the train and loaded on large farm wagons. The Philadelphia organization waited for the New York to arrive, and both organizations proceeded to march to camp. The baggage was ready to be issued when the regiment arrived at camp, and in a short time the camp had settled to the regular routine.

According to the "Record of Daily Happenings," this trip from the store to Island Heights took two hours and sixteen minutes.<sup>14</sup>

The 1914 daily "routine" conveys a sense of the camp's military-style scheduling. Twenty-nine "calls" during the day marked the parameters of waking, eating, exercise, clean-up, drills, playing and sleeping. Yet the "Record of Daily Happenings" fleshes out this rigid description, mentioning the competitions and prizes, visitors' days, special parades, concerts, speeches and sailing parties.

Whereas the boy's camp is more consistently referred to as a "military camp," the girl employees are frequently described as vacationers, with chaperons. Some records suggest similarities between the boy's and girl's camps--many photos of the female cadets in military formation have survived, for example. One former female cadet, employed by the store from 1926-1936, recalled "Had drilling and marching either with wooden guns or playing our instruments. Our uniforms were either dark blue with white trimming--or our dress uniform which we frequently wore at Camp of white with blue--One of our trips yearly at Camp was to go over to Seaside Heights to march and play our instruments in the yearly Baby parade." She wrote of the athletic endeavors as well as the marching and drilling formations.<sup>15</sup>

The "Report of the Cadet Girls' Camp," however, contrasts markedly with the rigidity for the boys' report from the same year. The report was written in a chatty style, probably by one of the participants.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Undated recent letter from Ida M. Brooks to Ms. Gillian, collection of Marilyn Kralik.

Each day, after breakfast, bed-making and room-tidying were over, the fun would begin. Part of our crowd would stay at home to take the regular morning instruction in swimming, under the direction of Miss Davenport....others started out for a long hike, and, strange to say, they always came home with berry-stained faces and hands, their pockets bulging with apples, and their arms often laden with ferns and flowers to adorn the table to future meals. Still others sailed off in the grand old "Mary Locke" with Captain Applegate, who was ever ready to go do just as we wished....Some few preferred to stay at "The Barracks" and write postals and letters most of their time--I wonder why!

The girls' other activities including crabbing, and auto trips. They seemed to have a great deal more choice in scheduling the day. The writer recalled that "The evenings were spent in dancing, singing, and often in amateur theatricals--and weren't they jolly evenings! The men callers joined in all our fun." Only one swimming contest was mentioned, New York against Philadelphia. The record of the return trip again lacked the formality of the boys' voyage--"Our trip to Camden was a jolly one, each of us trying to talk louder and faster than the rest as we related our good times."<sup>16</sup>

Wanamaker Hall offers the opportunity to study employer paternalism and concern over working-class city young people, and the activities of these employees as part of the larger summer camp movement of this era. The Hall's history also provides material on the development of amateur athletic clubs, and the era's varying reliance upon military models.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION<sup>17</sup>

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Wanamaker's "barracks" is an unusual wood-frame hall, evocative of castles because of its parapets. Small oriels projected from the roofline originally, as did a belvedere/observatory (from the two-story section). From a distance, the shingle siding resembled stonework, and rusticated wooden quoins overlay the shingles at the building's corners, furthering its medieval effect. Early photographs show flags flying from tall poles at the building's corners and the

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<sup>16</sup> The John Wanamaker Commercial Institute 1915, no page.

<sup>17</sup> Much of this architectural description benefitted from a report dated April 1987, by Short and Ford Architects, "Analysis of the Municipal Facilities." This is particularly true of the interior description, since access into Wanamaker Hall was not possible.

observatory. One historian has found that the design simultaneously evokes the military and the whimsical.<sup>18</sup>

2. Condition of fabric: The building has been vacant for a number of years and is in poor condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The structure consists of a two-story, three-bay-wide main block with long, single-story wings, each with a gable-front pavilion flanked with towers to the center of it.
2. Foundations: The building rests on concrete piers; original piers at the perimeter only.
3. Wall construction: The original wood shingles--square butt on the first floor and patterned on the second--have been covered with uniform, square asbestos shingles.
4. Structural system, framing: The building is of wood frame construction.
5. Porches: The two-story barracks has a one-story veranda on the east and west sides. The floor consists of 3-1/4" tongue-and-groove wood boards, while the ceiling has 7-1/2" double-beaded-board sheathing and exposed rafters. The shape of the bays on the veranda is imitated in the window design of later additions.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The double doors of the entry have eight lights above a wood panel.
  - b. Windows: Most of the original windows are in place, although stacked awning units have replaced two windows on the east side of the assembly hall. The two-story section has double-hung sash windows; while the assembly hall has multi-light casement windows grouped in threes. The windows are single glazed; plain 4" wide casing and a lintel with crown and drip cap surround each window. The gable windows are missing sash and glass panes.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The two-story building has a gabled roof with a much shallower pitch than the assembly hall. This portion of the roof is

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<sup>18</sup> Marilyn Kralik, unpublished, undated manuscript, p. 14. This description is somewhat historical because many of the building's defining features have been altered.



covered with accumulated and various roofing materials, patched with fiberglass, and given a layer of aluminum paint. The assembly hall roof is gabled with a 5/12 pitch, has green interlocking shingles on the southern portion, and recently the northern section has been re-roofed with three tab self-sealing asphalt shingles. The roofs of both sections are partially masked by a crenelated parapet.

b. Towers: The two-story portion of the building originally has a centered belvedere/observation tower, and corner oriels.

#### C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: (see architect drawings)
  - a. First floor: The building's one-story portion has been divided into two large rooms. The two-story section has smaller offices, restrooms and common spaces.
  - b. Second floor: The small second story has seven smaller rooms, and a restroom.
2. Stairways: Much of the balustrade is missing. Many of the exterior concrete stairs have been removed.
3. Flooring: There are 2-1/4" tongue-and-groove wood floors, with some water damage.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls consist of 2-3/4" x 3-3/4" studs and beaded-board sheathing. Drywall partitions were used in the more recent subdivisions of the interior. One room has 4' x 8' sheets of wood paneling on the east, west, and north walls.
5. Mechanical systems: The heating, electrical, and plumbing systems are no longer serviceable.

#### D. Site:

1. General Setting: Wanamaker Hall remains sited in an open lawn, with the hall at the edge of Barnegat Bay--a drop of x feet and a retaining wall. The original parcel was 6.58 acres. The 1915 yearbook describes that in the 1914 season the camp had two hundred new tents with board floor. The organizers laid out seven company streets with each company having 24 tents 7 x 7. The officers' tents stood at the head of company streets; Regimental staff and officers had larger 9' x 9' tents. That same year, electric lights lit the company streets, apparently improving discipline.
2. Outbuildings: A building which pre-dates the camp but served as an administrative building, the "Holly House," still stands on the site. Other buildings constructed during the Presbyterian Church's ownership have been converted to other uses. The church's chapel is presently the

town's post office, and several one-and-a-half-story cabins are now part of the municipal complex.

3. Landscaping, enclosures: Early photographs show that for some years rustic-style furniture sat on the lawn. Near the water stands a monument to the J.W.C.I. cadets who fought in the Battle of Verdun. The dedication reads: "Verdun--Ici fut Arrete L'Enhivasseur--1918."

#### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old views: Marilyn Kralik, of the Island Heights Cultural and Heritage Association, has an excellent collection of photographs. The Bishop Library in Tom's River and the Ocean County Historical Museum might have additional materials. The J.W.C.I. and Meadowbrook yearbooks published by Wanamaker's contain numerous photographs.

B. Primary and unpublished sources: An enormous collection of John Wanamaker's materials have been donated to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and is in the process of being catalogued. In addition, the Island Heights Cultural and Heritage Association has collected some material in its efforts to prevent the building's demolition. See also:

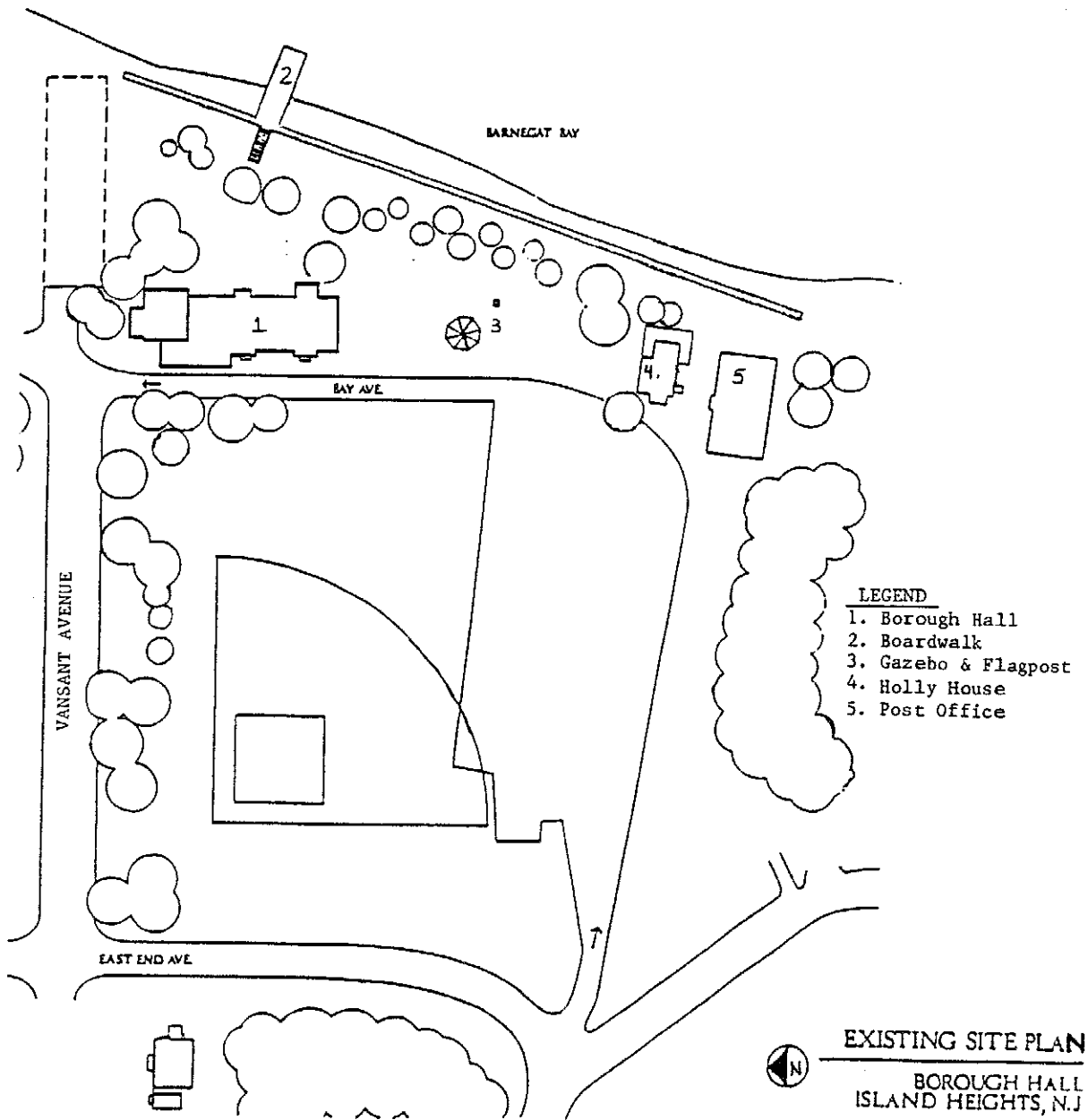
Sebold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

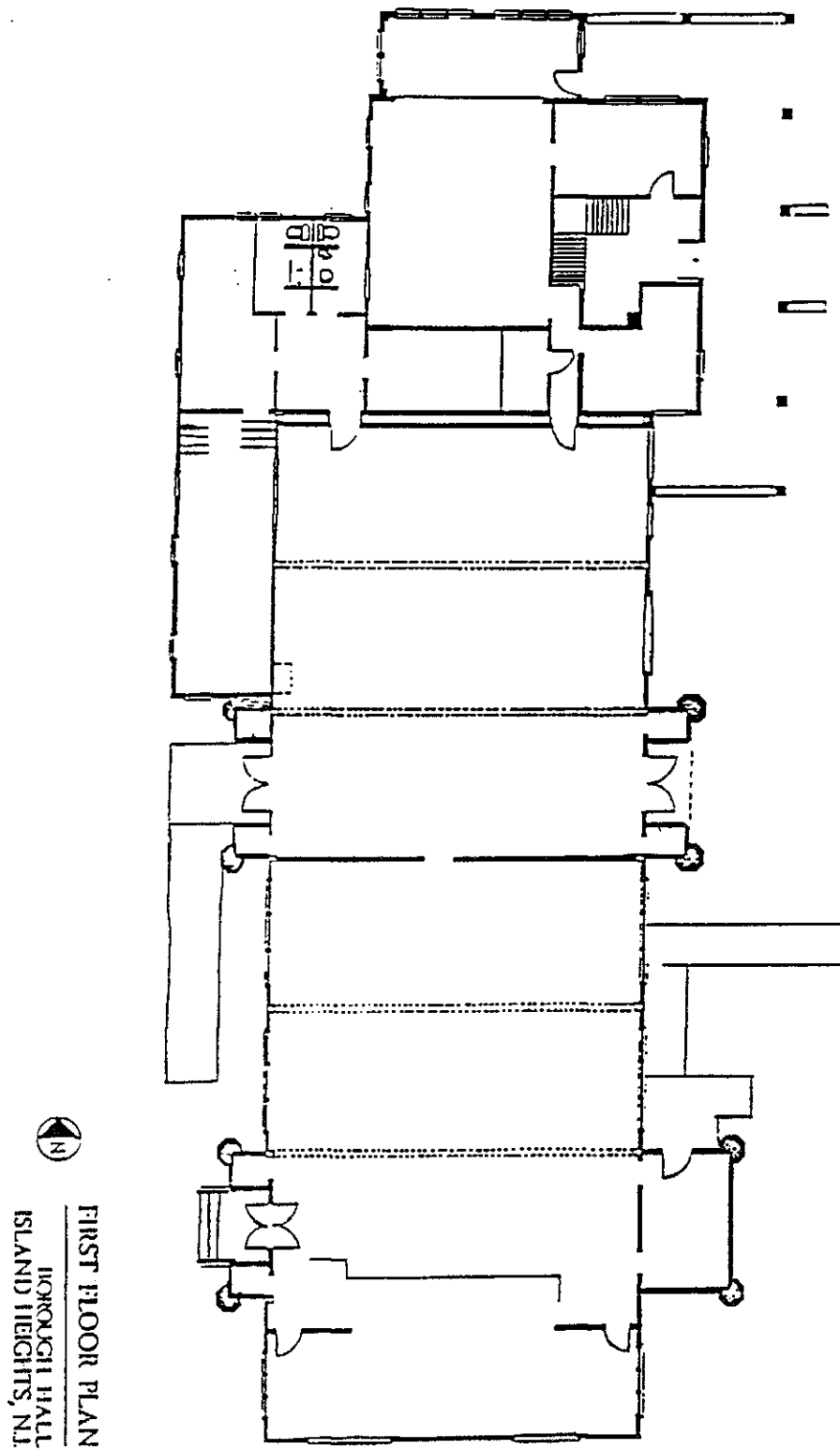
The project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), under the direction of Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian. The project was completed during summer 1992. The project historian was Kimberly R. Sebold (University of Delaware). The photography was produced by David Ames, University of Delaware, Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering.

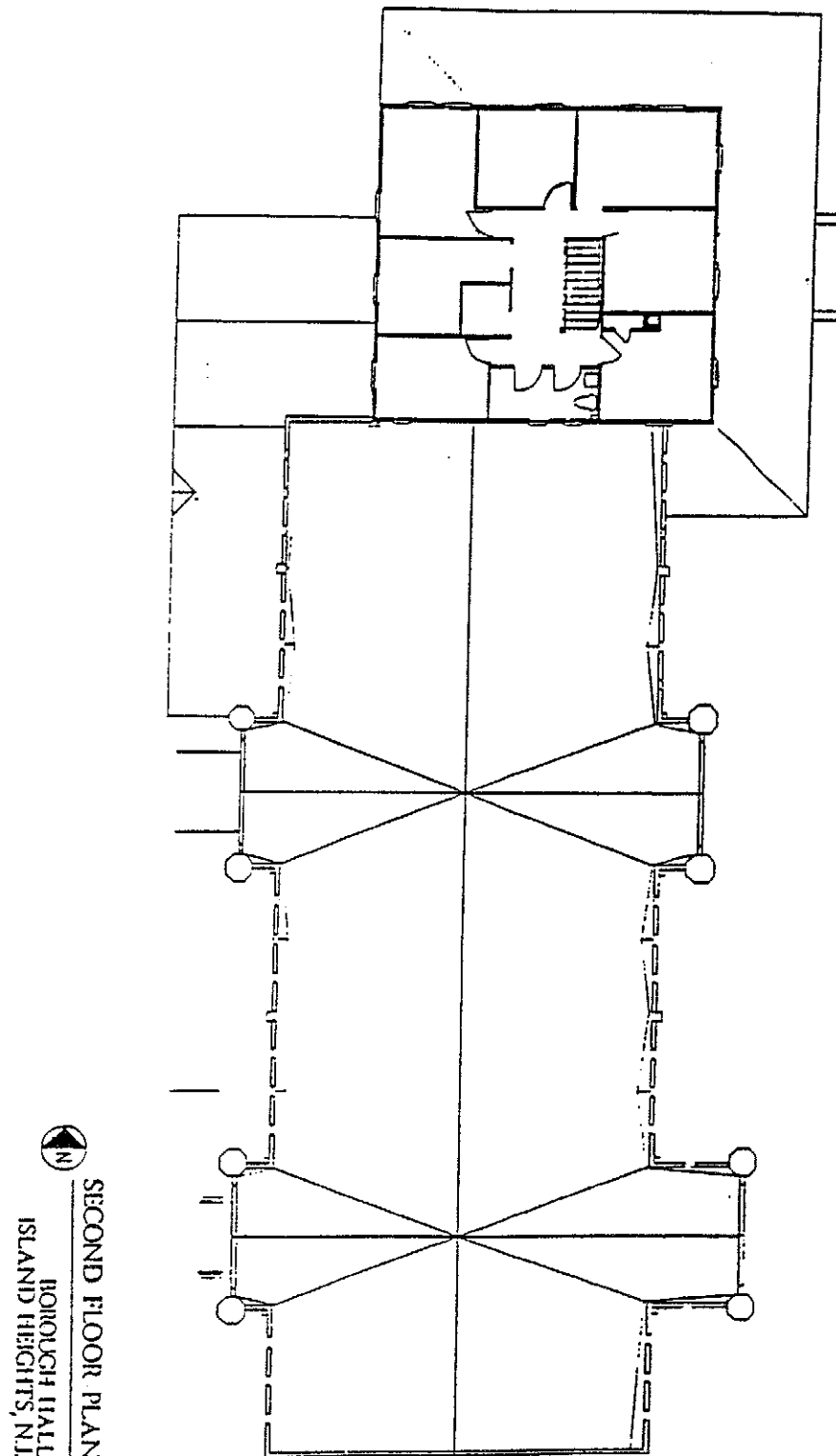
Existing Site Plan

Island Heights

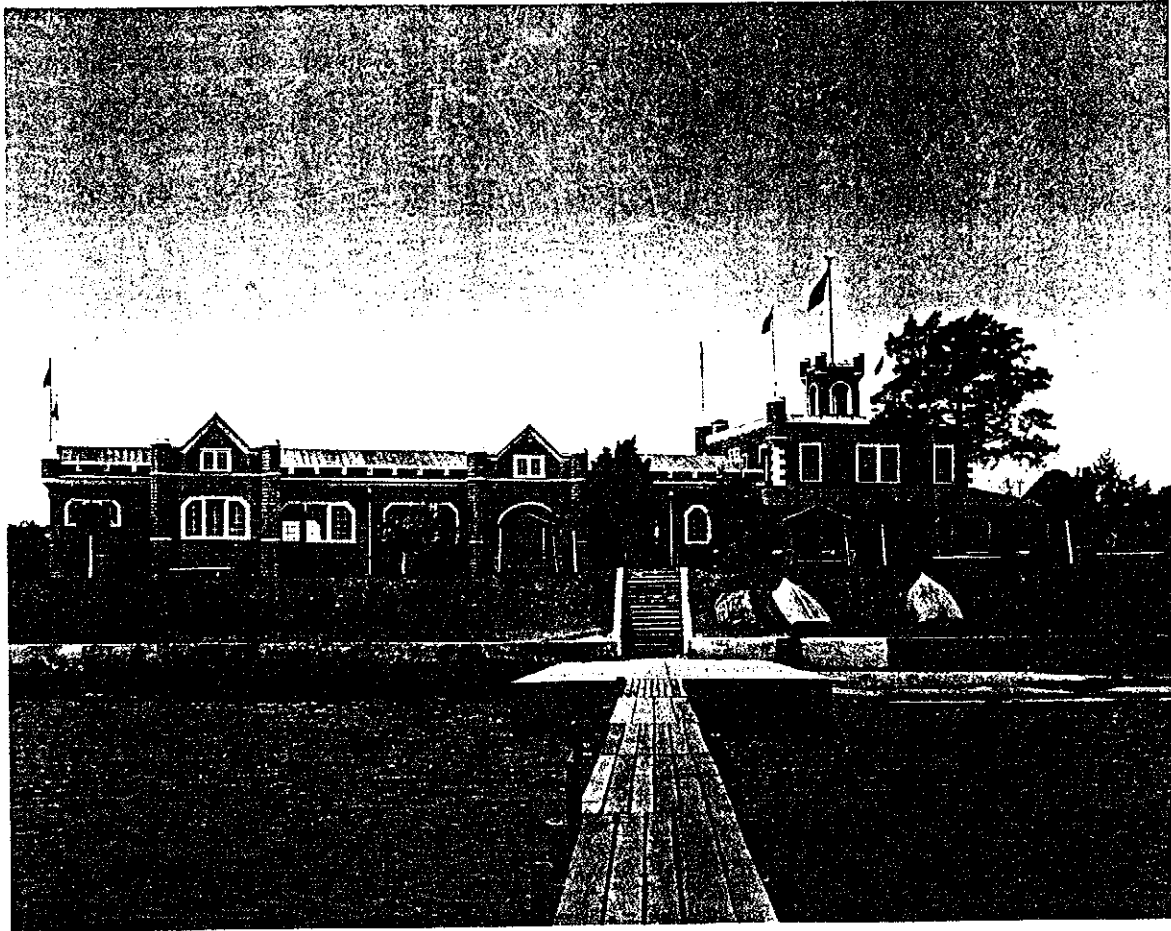


Short and Ford Architects, "Analysis of the Municipal Facilities," (April 1987)

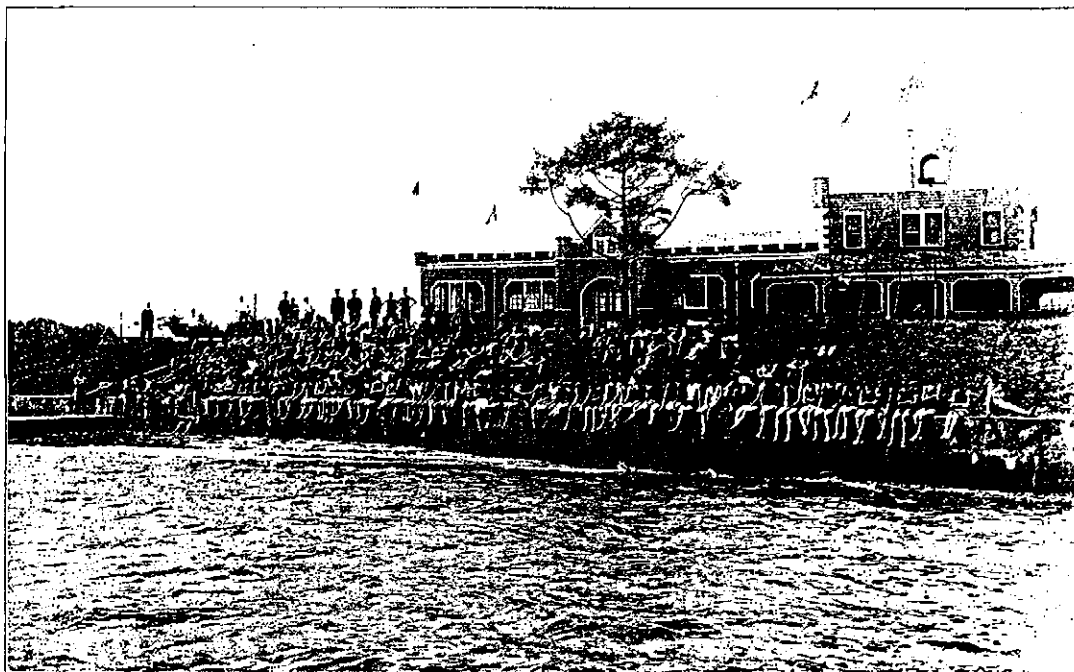




Short and Ford Architects, "Analysis of the Municipal Facilities,"  
(April 1987)



Meadowbrook Club Yearbook 1920, (The Wanamaker Store, Philadelphia, 1920)



J. W. C. I. BARRACKS, ISLAND HEIGHTS, N. J. - AWAITING WATER CALL



INSPECTION OF QUARTERS



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Meadowbrook Club Yearbook 1920, (The Wanamaker Store, Philadelphia, 1920)